

SENSITIVE SITE EXPLOITATION GUIDE

Sensitive site exploitation (SSE), also called forensic photography, creates a visual record of the original scene and physical evidence at accidents, crime scenes and similar events. Designated authorities use this imagery for analysis, measurement, investigations and court evidence.

When asked to support an SSE operation, you are a vital part of the investigation process. It's your responsibility to capture a visual record of the initial scene condition and all physical evidence. SSE imagery supports a variety of situations, including:

- air or ground mishaps
- suicide or homicide
- accidents or fatality
- mass graves
- weapon cache
- torture chamber
- weapons manufacturing facility
- improvised explosive device (IED) scene
- indirect fire (IDF) scene
- enemy safe house

The images you take may help investigators piece together what happened to assist with accident reports, criminal investigations, crime-solving, court evidence and disaster prevention. Apply the basic principles of photography – ISO, shutter speed and aperture – in the proper combination, so your imagery accurately represents the scene and physical evidence in their original state. Use these guidelines for your assigned SSE scene:

1. Report to an on-scene commander and identify yourself immediately. The on-scene commander may represent safety, fire protection, security police, investigations, medical aircrew protection or the scene's senior officer.
2. Ask for guidance on any safety precautions, specific imagery requirements and point of contact information for the investigating officer.
3. Do not interfere with first responders and other personnel performing essential duties related to the emergency. Work with first responders to get close

enough to capture the original scene's imagery without tampering/loss of evidence and without getting in their way.

- a. Do not touch anything or change any conditions! Photograph objects where they are.
- b. Adhere to policies that specifically address photographing classified items or equipment.

Create and bring a photo log to document the date and time images are captured and any relevant comments for the incident report or case file record. Use this checklist to ensure you capture all necessary images of the scene to support the investigative process.

Photograph the General View: Overview images of the scene provide a complete summary of the incident, evidence placement and scene conditions. Start at the farthest point outside the scene and work inward. Capture:

Establishing shots to show the entire scene in context, using a wide-angle view with identifiable landmarks, structures, signs, etc. to show the incident's location

Use external flash to better document evidence

Avoid flash reflections by bouncing the flash off the ceiling or removing the flash from the camera body

General views of the scene, using a normal lens to prevent focal length distortion and show the scene as an average observer would see it

Use overlapping shots of the scene at a closer distance to encompass the entire area (if necessary)

Work the scene from big (wide shots) to small (macro shots)

Point of entry and exit, if applicable, (e.g., doors and windows) that show where any suspect(s) may have entered, exited or used forced entry

Areas where the on-scene commander removed items

Articles left at the scene (e.g., weapons, clothing, identification cards or other items)

Marks from tools, shoes, tires, etc.

Specific views or other photos of less obvious evidence as directed by the on-scene commander

Evidence next to a slate, ruler or recognizable object for scale

Properly focus the subject

Avoid color alterations that could mislead investigators

Photograph the Exterior: Capture imagery that relates the scene to the surrounding area. Start by working at the outer perimeter and conduct a 360-degree rotation around the entire scene. Sites on government property and open to public view do not require a warrant. Capture:

External views of the building, even if the investigation scene is indoors

Take overlapping information in the shots

Document front, left, rear and right sides at a minimum

Intersection closest to the scene to acclimate the viewer to the surrounding area

Street signs or other well-known points of reference, excluding irrelevant distractions

Building numbers, addresses and names

Photograph the Interior: If applicable, document the interior. Capture:

Areas that bridge overview shots and individual pieces of evidence, using a wide lens in small rooms— be conscious of distortion

Evidence markers to highlight evidence in overview shots

Photograph the Four Corners: If the scene is inside of a room, capture:

- Entire scene from all corners of the room to show a 360-degree view

- Fixed features, e.g., walls, floors, ceiling lights, outlets, etc.

- All four walls with the film plane parallel (six or more photos may be necessary)

- Use bounce flash to avoid hot spots

- Use a wide-angle lens, if necessary, to get the proper coverage

- Eliminate the bottom third

- Avoid perspective and distortions

Take Mid-range Photos: Use medium-range images to document the appearance of any specific objects in relation to the whole scene. Adjust the lighting and other parameters to ensure your imagery accurately represents what is visible to the naked eye. Start at the farthest point outside the scene and work inward. Capture:

- Individual pieces of evidence from a natural perspective using the “equilateral triangle method”

- Be equidistant from the piece of evidence and a fixed feature

- Maintain proper distance correlations between pieces of evidence in a scene

- Some of the background to relate the evidence to the scene, especially if the suspect or victim is associated with an element in the background

- Medium shots of the body, if applicable, in relation to any evidence

Take Close-up Photos: Take close-up images of each piece of evidence before moving on to the next piece of evidence. Start at the farthest point outside the scene and work inward. Capture:

- Evidence “as found,” with nothing added or taken away from the scene

Evidence in a full-frame as large as possible to show detail, including identifying marks, nomenclature, dog tags, points of impact, entrance and exit wounds and spray patterns (e.g., blood, rounds and explosions)

Altered close-up evidence, as necessary, when an authority moves the original evidence, or it is not visible in previous photographs (Example: A knife may have blood on the underside that is not apparent in the original “as found” photo)

Use a different background to distinguish between the “as found” close-up photo and the altered close-up photo

Document the Body: If an investigation requires body documentation, capture:

Specific parts of the body and a fixed feature using a medium shot

Full-body panorama series

Body from all four sides

Fill the frame with the body and nothing else

Bottom and top half of the body if a single full-body image is not possible

Use a normal lens

Take both images from the same distance, carefully keeping the film plane parallel to the body so the photos can form a full-length view together

Full-face shot for identification

View(s) from directly above the body

A color scale next to bruising to show discoloration